

10. Romsey Show Silver Cups

Romsey Show Society: The Silver Cupboard

Eighteen months ago, when we opened the cupboard in the Committee Room of the old Market Place offices of the Romsey Agricultural and Horse Show Society, we discovered wonderful things, including an array of silver cups and trophies. The Society has a long and honourable history of awarding prizes at its annual show, and as the contents of the Silver Cupboard were catalogued, the story of these trophies began to throw fresh light on the history of the Society and the changes that have occurred. Over some 176 years, members have donated many cups and trophies to the Society for specific show classes. They have been argued over, recycled and even stolen from the homes of prize winners! This is a brief look at the story of some of them.

The Romsey Agricultural Society was formed with the aim of improving standards in agriculture in the Romsey area. Each year two Prize Shows offered prizes as an inducement to the owners and breeders of the best stock in the area to show their beasts and thereby raise the overall standards of animals at the Markets. Two prominent landowners were among the first in a long line of members to offer valuable prizes. In 1841 William Sloane Stanley, of Paultons Park, offered a prize of £5 for the best 2 acres of Swedish Turnips (what we now know as Swedes) – an indication of the growing importance of these root crops as cattle feed. In 1842 Sir John Barker-Mill offered a prize of a piece of silver plate to the value of £5 for the best ox 'to be fatted solely on the produce of the farm ... and never to have tasted oil cake or any artificial food of any sort'. A similar prize was offered for sheep. Clearly, Sir John did not approve of artificial feed for animals!

Sadly, Sir John's pieces of plate are long gone. The oldest surviving silverware dates from the 1930s with the Hurst Challenge Cup and Young Farmers Perpetual Challenge Cup dating from 1936, followed by the Taunton Cup and the Talbot Challenge Cup in 1938. Then when the Show recommenced after World War II in 1948 the Owen Lockyer Cup was introduced. Originally, these trophies were offered for various cattle classes such as Short Horn cattle, but as these classes were withdrawn due to lack of support in the late 1960s, the cups were re-allocated to the more popular horse and pony

classes. The re-allocation of trophies allows us to see how the Show reflects changes in farming practice since the 1950s. The number of cattle classes is greatly reduced – particularly in the dairy classes, and the absence of goat classes means that the silverware for their classes has not been awarded since the 1990s.

Cups and trophies continue to present problems long after the marquees and show rings have been dismantled. Every year, following the show, there are challenges to the award of prizes over real or imagined infringements of the rules, and every year the Committee manages to untangle these knotty problems. One such problem arose in September 1935 when Lord Swaythling, a prominent member of the Society and regular exhibitor in the Dairy Cattle classes, refused to return the Furze Down Cup which he had won for three consecutive years. He offered to replace it with a silver cup to be called the Townhill Cup, but the Committee demanded he return the original, which was a perpetual challenge cup, and took legal advice. The stand-off continued until July 1936 when a compromise was reached. Lord Swaythling returned the cup and was presented with a replica cup for each of the years he had won. In addition, a replica of the cup would be presented to all future winners of the cup. Honour was satisfied all round.

Trophies are usually held by the successful exhibitors for a year, and then returned to the Show office just prior to the next show. They are then lovingly cleaned and put on display outside the Show Office on Show day, guarded by members of the local cadet forces. In 1981, however, a group of trophies were not on display. Hillside Farm in Sussex had won six of the Dairy Cattle classes the previous year, but subsequently the farm was burgled and the trophies stolen, never to be recovered.

But a good array of silverware remains, and may be seen at this year's Show.

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